

LINCOLN'S  
LAST SPEECH IN  
SPRINGFIELD  
IN THE CAMPAIGN  
OF 1858





















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*Yours truly*  
*A. Lincoln*

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OF 1858



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## INTRODUCTION

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IN the election of 1858 Lincoln met defeat, but the ordeal that singed the politician, disclosed the statesman. An impartial observer, Lord Charnwood, declares that "the contest between Lincoln and Douglas was one of the decisive events in American history."

The closing debate of that contest was held in Alton on October 15, 1858. The election was set for November 2.

On October 30 William H. Herndon wrote from Springfield to Theodore Parker in Boston:

"Friend:

Today is Saturday, and in a little while Mr. Lincoln opens on our square, close to the State House, on the great vital and dominant issues of the day and age."

It is of interest that the speech delivered by Abraham Lincoln on that day should be now first published, after the lapse of more than sixty-five years.

But of deeper interest is the recognition that this long forgotten speech marks a turning point in Lincoln's career, that in its brief paragraphs the last echo of Lincoln the politician is lost in the resonance of the clearer note of Lincoln the statesman.

The gradual development is reflected in his collected works; the particular events which influenced the evolution can be briefly summarized. At the time of its delivery Lincoln was within a few

months of his fiftieth birthday. From the day of his first debate with Douglas in the court house in Springfield on November 19, 1839, Lincoln and Douglas had opposed each other, in a keen and often bitter rivalry. In 1856 Lincoln summed up the results of his political endeavors:

“Twenty-two years ago, Judge Douglas and I first became acquainted. We were both young then—he a trifle younger than I. Even then we were both ambitious,—I, perhaps, quite as much so as he. With me, the race of ambition has been a failure—a flat failure; with him, it has been one of splendid success.”

Two years later Lincoln accepted the nomination of his party for Senator, with the declaration which startled his friends more than it disturbed his enemies:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided.”

Douglas opposed him and with issues so vital, it seemed then, that this contest must settle the question of supremacy between them, by the elimination of one or the other from the field of politics. With ambition rekindled, Lincoln challenged Douglas to meet him in joint debate. Of their meeting Isaac N. Arnold says, “The whole American people paused to watch the progress of the debates, and hung with intense interest on the words and movements of the champions.” Lincoln in that campaign made more than one hundred speeches and visited every part of the state, traveling in slow conveyances and living in crowded taverns. “After a hundred consecutive days

of excitement, of intense mental strain, of unremitting bodily exertion, after speech-making and parades, music and bonfires,"<sup>1</sup> he turned homeward for the "rally" at Springfield. But before his speech had been written he had learned that some of his former friends and associates were making a determined effort to defeat him. We cannot at this date complete the record of defections which were then known to him and referred to in his speech:

"Myself, and those with whom I act have been constantly accused of a purpose to destroy the Union; and bespattered with every imaginable odious epithet; and some who were friends as it were, but yesterday, have made themselves most active in this."

But more disheartening to Lincoln than the "odious epithets" was the action of his old friend T. Lyle Dickey who secured a letter in praise of Douglas from Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky and caused it to be widely circulated in doubtful districts on the eve of the election. To Crittenden on November 4th, Lincoln wrote:

"The emotions of defeat at the close of a struggle in which I felt more than a merely selfish interest, and to which defeat the use of your name contributed largely, are fresh upon me."

In the *Chicago Daily Democrat* of November 9, 1858, it was said: "Senator Crittenden is entitled to the credit of defeating Mr. Lincoln." In a speech at Cincinnati in 1859 Lincoln said of Crittenden:

"A Senator from Kentucky whom I have always loved with an affection as tender and endearing as I have ever loved any man \* \* \* was writing letters to Illinois to secure the re-election of Douglas."

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<sup>1</sup>Abraham Lincoln, by Nicolay and Hay.



That Lincoln anticipated his defeat is expressed in his letter of November 19 to A. G. Henry:

“You doubtless have seen ere this the result of the election here. Of course I wished, but I did not much expect, a better result. \* \* \* and though I now sink out of view and shall be forgotten, I believe I have made some marks which will tell for the cause of civil liberty long after I am gone.”

Thus it was that Lincoln, worn by the exertions of his campaign, came to face his defeat, powerless to avert what seemed a certain and crushing end to his ambition. But a closing rally had been widely heralded—he must again speak before a gathering of vociferous Republicans, in whose enthusiasm, the intuition of defeat found no lodgment. And so he came to write this speech, and it was penned in the shadow of defeat, a defeat encompassed by those whom he had loved and trusted, a defeat that extinguished the last spark of ambition for political preferment, but left him firm in the determination to carry on the contest against slavery. On November 19 Lincoln wrote again, this time to Henry Asbury:

“The fight must go on. The cause of civil liberty must not be surrendered at the end of one or even one hundred defeats.”

The fight did go on and the “marks” that Lincoln made became a record of human freedom.

We cannot know if Lincoln foresaw the strain that was to come upon the Union from the cause he championed, but when it came he was ready to bear the burden. For him, was “the planting and the culture,” for humanity, “the harvest.”

OLIVER R. BARRETT



My friends, today closes the discussion of the  
canon. The planting and the culture are over,  
and there remains, but the preparation, and  
the harvest.

I have been surrounded by friends—some  
political, all personal friends, I think. May  
I be indulged, in this closing scene, to say a  
few words of myself. I have borne a labor-  
ous, and, in some respects, to myself a painful  
part in the contest. Though all, I have never  
other assailed, nor meddled with any part of  
the constitution. The legal right of the Southern  
people to receive their fugitives, I have constantly  
asserted. The legal right of Congress to interfere  
with <sup>their institutions</sup> ~~slavery~~ in the states, I have constantly denied.  
In resisting the spread of slavery to new territory, and  
with that, what appears to me to be a tendency  
to subvert the first principles of free <sup>liberty</sup> government,  
my whole effort has consisted. To the best of my  
power, I have labored for, and not against the  
Union. If I have not felt, so I have not ex-  
pressed any hostile sentiment towards our Southern  
brethren. I have constantly declared, as I really  
believe, the only difference between them and  
us, is the difference of circumstances—

FACSIMILE OF LINCOLN'S SPEECH



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## ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*"I reverence the individual who  
understands distinctly what it  
is he wishes; who unweariedly  
advances; who knows the  
means conducive to his object,  
and can seize and use them."*

—GOETHE

---

MY friends, today closes the discussions of this canvass. The planting and the culture are over; and there remains but the preparation, and the harvest.

I stand here surrounded by friends—some *political*, all *personal* friends I trust. May I be indulged, in this closing scene, to say a few words of myself. I have borne a laborious, and, in some respects to myself, a painful part in the contest. Through all, I have neither assailed, nor wrestled with any part of the constitution. The legal right of the Southern people to reclaim their fugitives I have constantly admitted. The legal right of Congress to interfere with their institution in the states, I have constantly denied. In resisting the spread of slavery to new territory, and with that, what appears to me to be a tendency to subvert the first principle of free government itself my whole effort has consisted. To the best of my judgment I have labored *for*, and not *against* the Union. As I have not felt, so I have not expressed any harsh sentiment towards our Southern brethren. I have constant-

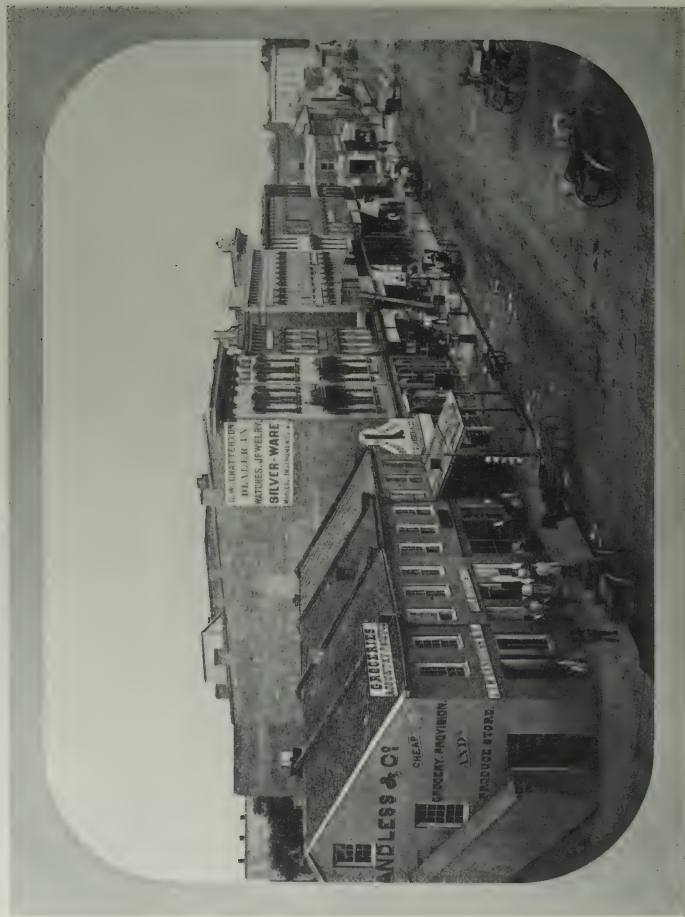
ly declared, as I really believed, the only difference between them and us, is the difference of circumstances.

I have meant to assail the motives of no party, or individual; and if I have, in any instance (of which I am not conscious) departed from my purpose, I regret it.

I have said that in some respects the contest has been painful to me. Myself, and those with whom I act have been constantly accused of a purpose to destroy the Union; and bespattered with every imaginable odious epithet; and some who were friends, as it were but yesterday have made themselves most active in this. I have cultivated patience, and made no attempt at a retort.

Ambition has been ascribed to me. God knows how sincerely I prayed from the first that this field of ambition might not be opened. I claim no insensibility to political honors; but today could the Missouri restriction be restored, and the whole slavery question replaced on the old ground of "toleration" by *necessity* where it exists, with unyielding hostility to the spread of it, on principle, I would, in consideration, gladly agree, that Judge Douglas should never be *out*, and I never *in*, an office, so long as we be both or either, live.





WEST SIDE OF SQUARE, SPRINGFIELD 1853



**MR. LINCOLN AT  
HOME**

==  
**OLD SANGAMON ERECT!!**  
==

**10,000 Freemen in Council!**  
==

**GREATEST DEMONSTRATION  
OF THE CAMPAIGN!**  
==

***Unprecedented Enthusiasm!!***  
=====

**S**ATURDAY last was a great day for the Whigs, Americans and Republicans of "old Sangamon." Their gallant leader had just returned from his triumphant passage through the State, and they assembled to the number of at least 10,000 strong to bid him welcome, and to assure him of their hearty participation in the further triumph to which he is about to lead them ere the setting of to-morrow's sun.

The weather, during the entire week, had been most unpropitious, the rain having fallen almost incessantly from Monday morning until Friday night, and the roads were almost impassable, being in a worse condition than at any former period

since the Spring rains. This fact highly encouraged our enemies, and caused great apprehension on the part of our friends, lest there should be but a small turn out. But the men of Sangamon are made of sterner stuff than to be thus daunted. Their hearts are deeply enlisted in the good cause they have espoused, and no circumstance, however difficult to overcome, would be permitted to dampen their ardor.

About 10 o'clock the city began to fill up with persons from the vicinity, and soon after the delegations from the various precincts, having their wagons gaily decked with banners and streamers, began pouring in, and successively marched around the State House square, until by 12 o'clock the city was full to overflowing. By this time the hopes of our enemies, who were confidently anticipating a "fizzle," had entirely fled, and many of them appeared equally interested with our friends in witnessing the beautiful display, and reading the amusing and pungent mottoes which abounded on all sides.

About this time the train from Jacksonville and intermediate points, with *nine cars full*, arrived, and were escorted to the square, and soon after a dispatch was received from the delegation coming from McLean

and Logan counties, stating they had *thirty-two cars full* on the way. This was the signal for a rush to the depot of the Chicago and Alton road, as every one was anxious to witness so grand a spectacle. The crowd around the depot was immense, filling every available spot, climbing upon the tops of the freight cars, upon the fences, and even in the tree tops. Soon the train came booming along, and sure enough it contained thirty-two cars, filled inside and covered on top, with a precious load of Lincolmites, who had come from the neighboring counties on the north to unite their shouts with their brethren of Sangamon.

How shall we convey to our readers an adequate conception of the majestic grandeur of the spectacle afforded by the entrance of this stupendous train, with its 4,000 passengers, drawn by two locomotives and gaily decorated with flags and banners? It was undoubtedly the longest passenger train and the rarest exhibition ever seen in the entire country. The cars were completely filled, both inside and out, and on their entrance into the city, the multitude on the tops of the cars rose to their feet, spread out their banners and came shouting for Lincoln and Liberty! The first car was labelled with the words, "A. LINCOLN, THE PRIDE OF ILLINOIS," and among the banners

borne by this delegation was one containing the busts of Lincoln and Clay, painted the size of life, and representing them as warm friends and true Republicans. Another contained the bust of Mr. Lincoln, with the words, "Abe Lincoln, our next Senator." The deafening cheers and joyful congratulations which succeeded the arrival of this train, we will leave to the imaginations of our readers to portray. This delegation was likewise escorted to the square, where it was united to the general procession.

It would have required a corps of twenty reporters to take notes of all the good things said and shown during the day, and we shall not attempt to give a minute account. The display was such as baffles description; and our readers must picture to themselves an immense host, with banners waving and flags flying, marching and countermarching through the principal streets—the stores and public buildings being gaily decorated the while—with thousands upon thousands of spectators crowding the windows and balconies and exhibiting their sympathy and fellowship by the shouting of men and the waving of handkerchiefs and flags in the hands of beautiful women—the whole interspersed with the sweet strains of music, the booming of the deep-toned cannon and the explosion

of vast quantities of firecrackers. It was indeed a spectacle well calculated to stir the souls of the united opposition with grateful emotion, and to carry dismay and consternation to the hearts of our enemies.

The speakers' stand was erected near the iron railing east side of the State House square, and the multitude filled every available spot in the vicinity. The steps of the Court House and the Marine Bank, together with the yards adjoining, were filled with persons, among whom were a great many ladies, and the streets and sidewalks opposite were covered with a dense mass of listeners. We should have stated in the proper place, that while the crowd at the depot were waiting the arrival of the mammoth train from the north, a large crowd was being addressed from this stand by Judge Cowan of Petersburg.

At two o'clock, the vast multitude being congregated around the stand, Mr. Lincoln began his speech. We have neither time nor room to give even a sketch of his remarks to-day. Suffice it to say, the speech was one of his very best efforts, distinguished

for its clearness and force, and for the satisfactory manner in which he exposed the rōrbacks and misrepresentations of the enemy. The conclusion of this speech was one of the most eloquent appeals ever addressed to the American people. It was received with spontaneous bursts of enthusiasm unequalled by any thing ever before enacted in this city.

Mr. L. was followed by Hon. Richard Yates, of Morgan, who held the vast multitude enchained by his eloquence until near six o'clock, when the crowd dispersed to obtain some refreshments and prepare for the evening.

A very large meeting assembled in the Rotunda of the State House after supper, and were successively addressed by Judge Cowan, Mr. Littlefield, of Jersey, Messrs. Cook, Matheny, Wilkinson, Hawker, King, Jayne, C. C. Brown and Fitzhugh, and adjourned with nine rousing cheers for Lincoln and the cause.

Altogether it was a magnificent demonstration and has prepared our friends for victory and our opponents for defeat.

For the reproduction of the foregoing account of the rally, and for discovering Mr. Morgan, credit is gratefully accorded to Mrs. Jessie Palmer Weber of the Illinois Historical Society.



STATE HOUSE, SPRINGFIELD 1838



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## A LETTER

### FROM JOHN H. MORGAN

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ON Saturday, October 30, 1858, Lincoln spoke in Springfield. I was present and remember parts but not all of his speech. I remember him saying he would gladly agree to be for Douglas if thereby his desires on the slave question would be fulfilled. I also remember him speaking of the abuse and slander heaped upon him. His speech was solemn and earnest throughout and the hearers received it with close attention. I have often wondered why the citizens of Springfield did not place a tablet on the spot where he stood while speaking.

Parts of his speech I remember as distinctly as if it were yesterday, but the balance I cannot remember—only the general import. It is so jumbled up in my memory that I cannot get it all connected.

The speaker's stand was erected against the state house fence. Lincoln stood six or eight feet south of the corner. On the stand with him were John M. Palmer and S. M. Cullom. There were five or six hundred men standing on the east side and the crowd overflowed around the corner, to the north side. There was a well-dressed, self-important looking man on a fine horse who pushed his way in, up close to Lincoln and when Lincoln said he was not in favor with interfering with slavery where it then existed, this man said in a loud voice so all could hear "How would you like to sleep with a nigger?" Lincoln stopped and

without replying looked the man in the eyes with a sad, pitiful look as if he felt sorry for him. The man hung his head, turning to get away, but the crowd held him, spitting all over him. Some took wet tobacco out of their mouths and threw it in his face; he was a filthy sight. Lincoln continued his talk as if he had not been interrupted.

At that time Senator Tom Corwin of Ohio was considered the greatest orator in the country, and before Lincoln spoke, word was passed around that Tom Corwin was speaking. I and many others went down to see the famous Tom Corwin. When I got there I knew the man, a pettifogging shyster from Petersburg, Tom Cowan. I so announced it but several men turned on me and declared it was Tom Corwin. The old scalawag was very witty and kept them highly amused. I said no more and they thought they were listening to a great man.

When Lincoln came to New Salem he and father formed a warm friendship that lasted their lifetime. When a little boy I often met Lincoln with father. He always greeted me with a hand shake and how are you *Bub*. About six or seven years before Lincoln was nominated, my father and Mr. Perkins, our next neighbor (a radical democrat), were on the jury and listened to Lincoln's plea on a most important case. That evening Perkins came over to talk it over with father. He declared it was the most powerful speech he ever heard come from the mouth of man. He said, "I told you, Henry, Lincoln has the right name, *Honest Abe*." "Yes," said father, "and I hope to live to vote for him for president." So I claim he was the first man to name Lincoln for president. He did vote for him twice. I only got to vote for him once as I spent over four years in the Army. Hoping this may be some use to you,

Yours,

JOHN H. MORGAN,

Petersburg, Illinois.

Feb. 1, 1922.

















